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### **Rusty Kath '03 "called up" to the majors**

*Summary: The former "voice of the Cougars" and St. Paul Saints public address announcer is the new in-stadium emcee for the Tampa Bay Devil Rays in St. Petersburg, Florida.*

(April 12, 2007)-Rusty Kath loves sports and loves talking. Those two gifts—along with a strong understanding of his audience—are the reasons the University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM) 2003 graduate in speech communication has been “called up” from the minors to the majors in the world of sports announcing. The former St. Paul Saints public address announcer is the new in-stadium emcee for the Tampa Bay Devil Rays in St. Petersburg, Florida. New baseball team, new city, new league, but Kath’s philosophy remains unchanged from his days as the voice of the UMM Cougars: “Keep fans informed, laughing and cheering, and even if the home team loses, they’ll show up again for the next game.”

Kath’s sportscasting career began as a first-year UMMer when he answered an ad for a Cougar baseball announcer in the student newspaper. “I liked baseball and needed a couple bucks to pay the bills,” recalls Kath. “After a week went by, I took my dad’s advice and went to the P.E. Center to make sure they received my application. I talked to Mark Fohl, athletic director and baseball coach. A few minutes later, I had the job. Had I not gone over there, I have no idea what I would be doing now. I can almost guarantee it wouldn’t be announcing for the Tampa Bay Devil Rays.”

From the “Fish House” (a.k.a. press box) behind home plate, Kath learned the ins and outs of baseball announcing from UMM’s sports information director. “Brian Curtis taught me a lot about the game and even more about announcing. He’s a talented guy who could be calling games in a number of major markets. I owe a great deal of my success to him.”

At the end of the season, Fohl asked Kath to announce Cougar hoops the following year. “He realized that basketball would allow my personality and talents to show through,” says Kath, “Had he not, I never would have developed the goods for the Saints or now the Devil Rays.”

The then struggling UMM basketball team gained a sixth player on the court with Kath announcing. “No matter how small, we celebrated Cougar accomplishments to the nth degree,” remembers Kath. “Plays and points by the opposing team were dramatically downplayed, sometimes disregarded. I provided necessary game information, and I also delivered stand-up comedy. The mike antics kept the fans in the bleachers.”

Kath credits his UMM experiences with giving him a head start in the real world. “‘Motown’ really put me ahead in this field,” he says. “It is often assumed that a large university is the best place to get exposure in media, theatre, or really any field. A place like Morris offers much greater opportunity. Being a smaller school, I announced as an undergrad. Receiving one-on-one attention from experts in their fields like Brian Curtis and Mike Cihak in Media Services goes SO much farther than slowly working your way up at a larger institution. Allowing me to show what I could do, and more importantly to make mistakes—and there were many—while still going to school was priceless. When I graduated, I was four years ahead in the game over my competition.”

UMM's liberal arts curriculum benefited Kath, as well. "I'm not just a guy who knows how to talk into a microphone. I know a bit about a lot of different things. Media outlets don't want voices they want personalities. UMM allows you to pursue everything you're interested in, and give you support and experts to guide your journey. For me, it was a perfect fit."

The Buffalo native is adjusting well to his new position under the dome at Tropicana Field with its 35-feet high video boards and 10,000-gallon aquarium, but family and good memories will keep Kath coming back to Minnesota. The Cougar alumni baseball game brings him back to campus in the spring. And even though his new team is the Devil Rays, he is still a big Twins fan, a former employee, in fact: "As a highlight logger, I watched the games in some of the best seats in the house—the press box, ate hot dogs, talked to local media, did about 15 minutes of work per night recording game highlights for Major League Baseball, and got paid to watch the Twins. One of the best jobs I've ever had!" Kath also enjoyed working for the Wild and the Swarm as an announcer.

And Kath will treasure memories of perfect Minnesota evenings at Midway Stadium, where he earned a great reputation as a fun-loving entertainer. "Before Saints games I made it a point to walk through the parking lot full of tailgaters," remembers Kath. "I've never seen people so genuinely happy. Minnesotans realize that grilling, or having a beer with friends, or playing catch with their kids will all too soon come to an end. They soaked up every bit, because sub-zero temps are just around the corner. If I wasn't up for the game, the tailgaters got me there. I understood how lucky I was. I may never again find a job that fits me so well as the Saints. Watching outdoor baseball, making fun of the opposing team, signing autographs, leading cheers, coordinating a chaotic amount of promotions, and getting paid for what I love to do."

Kath will be back in Minnesota on Tuesday, August 7, 2007, for a "UMM and Rusty Kath Night at the St. Paul Saints Game" event.

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